

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-359. (Canceled)

360. (Currently amended) A method for processing meat primals, comprising:

obtaining meat primals having at least fat and water;

reducing the bacteria on the meat primals;

transferring the meat primals to containers;

removing oxygen from the containers;

sealing the containers;

storing the containers;

removing the primals from the containers and cutting the primals to provide primal portions;

placing the primal portions into barrier packages substantially impermeable to oxygen;

introducing a gas into the packages, ~~wherein the majority of said gas comprises gas other than air~~ at a positive pressure to dissolve some of the gas therein, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide;

sealing the packages with a flexible lid; and

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria, wherein further absorption of the gas by the meat does not result in substantial inward deformation of the lid.

361. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the packages contain information related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

362. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions higher than the proportion of oxygen in air.

363. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions lower than the proportion of oxygen in air.

364. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

365. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein testing is done in the package.

366. (Currently amended) A method for producing ground meat, comprising:
grinding meat to provide ground meat;

exposing the meat to ~~[[a gas]]~~ carbon dioxide at a pressure greater than 100 psig before or during grinding, wherein ~~said gas~~ carbon dioxide inhibits bacterial growth~~[[,]]~~; and ~~wherein the majority of said gas comprises carbon dioxide;~~

~~transferring the ground meat to a web of barrier material substantially impermeable to oxygen;~~

~~sealing the web to enclose the ground meat in an atmosphere having an oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air;~~

~~testing the ground meat for the presence of bacteria; and~~

~~applying indicia to the web, wherein the indicia include information related to the ground meat~~

after grinding, exposing the meat to carbon dioxide at a pressure greater than 300 psig.

367. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the meat is ground in a gas having an oxygen content lower than the oxygen content of air, and the quantity of oxygen in the sealed web is not more than 500 ppm.

368. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

369. (Currently amended) A method for producing a meat product, comprising:

harvesting meat portions from an animal, ~~said meat comprised of several components, including at least fat, muscle, and water,~~ wherein the amount of ~~at least one component~~ fat in each portion is determined;

treating the meat portions with an agent including water that inhibits the growth of bacteria;

grouping the meat portions into classifications according to the amount of fat in each portion;

combining ~~quantities of~~ meat portions from one or more of the classifications to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of ~~at least one component~~ fat;

determining the proportion of water in the meat product;

enclosing the meat product within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product;

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and

applying information to the package, including information relating to the packaged meat product.

370. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent is acidic.

371. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent comprises carbonic acid.

372. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package provides recesses to contain liquids that may escape from the meat.

373. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

374-421. (Canceled)

422. (Currently amended) A method for packaging meat, comprising:

transferring pieces of meat to individual packages;

transferring the individual packages to a separate barrier container substantially impermeable to oxygen, wherein the individual packages occupy less than 50% of the volume of the barrier container;

introducing a blend of gases to the barrier container, wherein said gases include carbon monoxide; and

sealing the barrier container to prevent the escape of gases therefrom.

423. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, further comprising reducing the bacteria on the meat.

424. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 423, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

425. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, further comprising removing oxygen from the barrier containers.

426. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 425, further comprising storing the barrier containers.

427. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 367, wherein the gas contains carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

428. (Currently amended) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising:
harvesting meat portions comprised of several components, ~~including at least fat, muscle,~~
~~and water~~, wherein the amount of ~~at least one component~~ fat in each portion is determined;

grouping the meat portions into classifications according to the amount of fat in each portion;

combining ~~quantities of~~ meat portions from one or more of the classifications to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of ~~at least one component~~ fat;

determining the proportion of water in the meat product;

enclosing the meat product with a selected gas within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product;

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and

applying information to the package, including information relating to the packaged meat product.

429. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein the selected gas contains an amount of carbon monoxide.

430. (Currently amended) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising:
combining a first quantity of meat with a second quantity of meat, wherein at least one of said quantities of meat has been treated with a measured amount of carbon dioxide and a predetermined an amount of water that replaces water that evaporates from the meat during processing, wherein the amount of water is based on the amount of carbon dioxide.

431. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 430, further comprising combining the first and second quantities of meat in proportions according to at least one variable in at least one of the selected quantities to provide proportioned meat.

432. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 431, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into an enclosed conduit.

433. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 432, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

434. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 433, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into packaging.

435. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 434, wherein the packaging comprises a barrier package containing a selected gas.

436. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 435, wherein the selected gas includes a measured amount of carbon monoxide.

437. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 433, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

438. (Currently amended) A method for producing meat, comprising:
transferring a first stream of meat to a device ~~capable of~~ for measuring ~~fat or~~ water;
transferring a second stream of meat to a device ~~capable of~~ for measuring ~~fat or~~ water;
and

combining the first and second streams of meat to produce a combined stream of meat that has ~~fat or~~ water content adjusted by adjusting the rate of transfer of the first and the second streams of meat, wherein the first and second streams of meat are in contact with a gas while transferring to said device, wherein said gas has an oxygen content greater than 5 ppm and less than 5% by volume.

439. (Currently amended) A method for producing meat, comprising:
transferring a first stream of meat to a device ~~capable of~~ for measuring ~~fat or~~ water;
transferring a second stream of meat to a device ~~capable of~~ for measuring ~~fat or~~ water;
and

combining the first and second streams of meat to produce a combined stream of meat that has ~~fat or~~ water content adjusted by adjusting the rate of transfer of the first and the second streams of meat, wherein combining takes place in the presence of a gas that has an oxygen content greater than 5 ppm and less than 5% by volume.

440. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

441. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

442. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

443-444. (Canceled)

445. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the packages contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

446. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 445, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

447. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

448. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 447, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

449. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

450. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 449, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

451. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the indicia contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

452. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 451, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

453. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, wherein the containers contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

454. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 453, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

455. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 434, wherein the packaging contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

456. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 455, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage of the packaging.

457. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 438, further comprising packaging the combined meat in a package wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the packaged meat.

458. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 457, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

459. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 439, further comprising packaging the combined meat in a package wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the packaged meat.

460. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 459, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

461. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 425, further comprising storing the barrier containers for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

462. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

463. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 361, further comprising storing the packages for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

464. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, further comprising storing the meat for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

465. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 423, further comprising storing the container for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

466. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

467. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 429, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

468. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 442, further comprising storing the packaged meat for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

469. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 438, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

470. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 439, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

471. (Canceled)

472. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

473. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

474. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

475. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

476. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 429, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

477. (Canceled)

478. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

479. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

480. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package contains gas comprising carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

481. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, wherein the blend of gases comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

482. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 438, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

483. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 439, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

484-487. (Canceled)

488. (New) The method of Claim 366, further comprising transferring the ground meat to a web of barrier material substantially impermeable to oxygen.

489. (New) The method of Claim 488, further comprising sealing the web to enclose the ground meat in an atmosphere having an oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air.

490. (New) The method of Claim 489, further comprising testing the ground meat for the presence of bacteria.

491. (New) The method of Claim 490, further comprising applying indicia to the web, wherein the indicia include information related to the ground meat.

492. (New) The method of Claim 366, wherein each step is performed within a conduit that continuously excludes oxygen from contacting the ground meat.

493. (New) The method of Claim 430, wherein each step is performed within a conduit that continuously excludes oxygen from contacting the ground meat.

494. (New) The method of Claim 438, wherein each step is performed within a conduit that continuously excludes oxygen from contacting the ground meat.

495. (New) The method of Claim 439, wherein each step is performed within a conduit that continuously excludes oxygen from contacting the ground meat.

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